



## OFFICE OF THE SAINT LOUIS COUNTY ATTORNEY

**KIMBERLY J. MAKI** COUNTY ATTORNEY

January 20, 2022

**CONTACT:** Wade Backstrom County Attorney's Office  
St. Louis County Courthouse  
Duluth, MN 218-726-2323

### **St. Louis County Attorney's Office Declines Charges**

The St. Louis County Attorney's Office has declined charges in the death of Ryan Douglas Moats.

Mr. Moats tragically passed away in the early morning hours of June 26, 2021, following an altercation at Pine Mill Court in Virginia, Minnesota.

After engaging in mutual verbal taunting, Mr. Moats shoved James Marice Edwards, and a brawl ensued during which Mr. Moats and Mr. Edwards wrestled and punched at each other. A bystander used a stun gun in an attempt to separate the two men. After achieving the upper hand in the brawl, Mr. Moats stated that he was having a heart attack and disengaged from the brawl by retreating to his truck.

Mr. Edwards followed Mr. Moats to the truck. At 12:46 AM, 911 was called to summon an ambulance. During this time, Mr. Edwards punched the closed truck door and pulled off the door handle before walking away from the truck. Mr. Edwards approached the truck again and opened the truck door. He appeared to have an interaction with Mr. Moats. The specific nature and severity of the interaction, if any, is unclear. Mr. Moats did not re-engage with Mr. Edwards at the truck. Eventually, Mr. Edwards left the area.

After Mr. Edwards left, Mr. Moats was found unresponsive. Paramedics, arrived at 12:51 AM, and were unable to revive Mr. Moats.

The medical examiner classified the manner of Mr. Moats' death as Homicide. However, the National Association of Medical Examiners, in *A Guide for Manner of Death Classification*, notes that, "the classification of Homicide for the purposes of death certification is a 'neutral' term and neither indicates nor implies criminal intent, which remains a determination within the province of legal processes." Thus, the Homicide classification is a medical classification only and has no legal bearing on whether Mr. Edwards is guilty of a crime resulting in Mr. Moats' death.

The medical examiner determined that Mr. Moats' death was caused by the combined effects of methamphetamine and the physiological stressors of the altercation. Mr. Moats was also found to have a 60-70% blocked artery. The medical examiner indicated that the physical injuries sustained by Mr. Moats during his encounter with Mr. Edwards were not life-threatening. The medical examiner explained that the demands on Mr. Moats' heart from the methamphetamine and physiological stressors of the altercation, with the added hinderance of the blocked artery, caused Mr. Moats' heart to fail.

Upon referral of the case from the Virginia Police Department, the County Attorney's Office undertook an extensive review of the evidence for potential charges of first and second degree

manslaughter. The first review was conducted by the Range Criminal Division Head, Bonnie Norlander, and a second, wholly independent review was conducted by Vicky Wanta, a senior prosecutor from the Duluth Criminal Division. Their conclusions were then also reviewed and affirmed by Nate Stumme, Duluth Criminal Division Head.

In order to bring charges, prosecutors must determine that a case meets the office's charging standard, which requires a reasonable likelihood of conviction. After analyzing the evidence and applicable law, the County Attorney's Office concluded that this case does not meet its charging threshold for a number of reasons, including, most notably:

- (1) The medical event involving Mr. Moats' heart, caused by the combined effects of methamphetamine and the physiological stressors of the altercation, began during the first confrontation between Mr. Moats and Mr. Edwards. Because both Mr. Moats and Mr. Edwards were mutually engaging in the first confrontation, it would be considered a brawl under Minnesota law. Mr. Edwards' involvement in this mutual brawl does not rise to the level of culpable negligence, which is a required element for second degree manslaughter. Nor does it rise to the level of a fifth degree assault, which is a required element for first degree manslaughter.
- (2) In the second confrontation at the truck, the nature and severity of the physical interaction, if any, is unclear. Moreover, the medical examiner cannot say that what happened at the truck changed the trajectory of the already ongoing medical event involving Mr. Moats' heart. The medical examiner cannot pinpoint at what time or during which confrontation Mr. Moats sustained his physical injuries. Accordingly, it cannot be proven beyond a reasonable doubt that Mr. Edwards' actions at the truck were a substantial causal factor of Mr. Moats' death.

In light of the foregoing, the County Attorney's Office has determined that it cannot, in good conscience and in compliance with the ethical obligations by which prosecutors are bound, file a manslaughter charge in this matter.

"We first want to express our condolences again to the Moats family. We are very sorry for the loss of their loved one. Second, we want to thank the Virginia Police Department and other contributing law enforcement agencies for the good work they did on this case.

While the investigation conducted was thorough, the facts create a significant hurdle of evidence that introduce reasonable doubt. As ministers of justice, we bring charges only in those cases that are supported by evidence we believe to be sufficient to obtain a conviction," stated County Attorney Kim Maki.

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